

Goosebumps

SERIES 2000

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**Bride
of the
Living
Dummy**

SCHOLASTIC

PARACHUTE



1

"Jillian — what are you doing?"

I heard my sister's squeaky voice from my bedroom doorway. I dropped another dead fly into the glass cage. Petey's pointed pink tongue shot out and lapped it up.

"Mmmmm. Juicy fly meat," I murmured to him. "Nice and rare."

"What are you doing?" Katie repeated.

I turned to the door. "I'm practising the violin," I told her.

Katie made a disgusted face. "No, you're not. You're feeding that lizard."

"Duh," I replied, rolling my eyes. I held up a dead fly. "Want a snack? Yum, yum."

"That lizard is gross," she moaned.

"I like him," I insisted. I reached into the cage and tickled Petey under his flat, leathery chin. "It's late. Why are you still up?" I asked my sister.

She yawned. "I'm not tired," she replied.

Amanda, Katie's twin, stepped into the room. "I'm not tired, either," she declared. "And neither is Mary-Ellen. Mary-Ellen wants us to stay up till midnight!"

I groaned. "Get Mary-Ellen out of my room, please," I said through gritted teeth.

"Mary-Ellen can go wherever she wants!" Amanda insisted.

"Mary-Ellen doesn't like you, Jillian," Katie added with a sneer. "She hates you and she hates your lizard!"

"Well, I hate Mary-Ellen!" I cried. "Get her out of my room!"

I know, I know. I was being as babyish as my six-year-old sisters. But I can't help it. I really do hate Mary-Ellen.

Ever since Dad brought Mary-Ellen home, life here at the Zenman house has been difficult.

Mary-Ellen is a huge doll, almost as tall as the twins. She has frizzy brown hair made out of mop yarn. A red, heart-shaped mouth twisted up in a sick grin. Strange violet-coloured glass eyes. And ugly blood-red circles painted on her round cheeks.

The doll is a *horror* — but the girls treat her as a third sister. They dress up the doll in their clothes. They talk to her. They sing to her. They pretend to feed her. And they drag her everywhere they go.

They are much nicer to Mary-Ellen than they

are to me. At night, I plan horrible things I'm going to do to that disgusting doll.

Amanda slung the big doll over her shoulder. "Mary-Elan says we can stay up till midnight," she told me.

I clipped another juicy fly into Petey's open mouth. "I don't think Mum and Dad care what a big, ugly doll says," I replied.

The girls turned and started to leave. "You'll be sorry," Katie warned me. "You'll be sorry you were nasty to Mary-Elan."

"Mary-Elan says you'll be sorry," Amanda added. The doll's big head bounced on her shoulder as she walked out of the room.

I slammed the door shut and let out a long sigh. Why do six-year-olds have to be so annoying?

I finished feeding Petey. Then I called a few friends and talked for a while, trying to make plans for the weekend.

I fell asleep around eleven-thirty. I dreamed about my friend Harrison Cohen. I dreamed that he and I could fly. We were flying over our school, and all our friends were amazed.

A sharp *CLICK* pulled me from my dream.

I woke up with a startled gasp. And squinted into the darkness of my room.

I heard another metallic *CLICK*. And then a sharp scraping sound.

A silvery blade flashed in the darkness.

Huh? A blade?
What's going on? I wondered.
I tried to move. Too late.
The blade swooped down to my throat — and
I started to scream.

2

I shot out both hands. I tried to grab the blade. Push it away.

I heard a soft giggle.

The bedside light flickered on.

"Huh?" I let out a shocked cry as I stared at my sisters' grinning faces.

Katie held a pair of long metal scissors in her hand. Her smile faded. "You ruined our surprise," she moaned.

"Huh? Surprise?" My heart pounded in my chest. "What are you doing in here?" I cried breathlessly.

"We wanted to surprise you," Katie replied.

"We wanted to give you a haircut."

My mouth dropped open — but no sound came out. I was too horrified to speak.

"A haircut?" I finally choked out. "A haircut?"

"Why did you have to wake up?" Amanda cried. "You ruined everything!"

"I — I'll ruin you!" I cried. With a furious

shriek, I grabbed the scissors from Katie's hand.

The girls are always playing horrid tricks on me. But never anything as horrible as this. "Whatever gave you the idea —?" I sputtered.

"Mary-Ellen said you need a haircut," Katie replied, tugging my hair. "It was Mary-Ellen's idea."

I angrily shoved her hand away. "Get . . . out . . . of . . . my . . . room," I said through gritted teeth. "I will pay you back for this. I promise I will pay you back."

They both sighed and turned to leave.

"Know what I'm going to do?" I called after them. "I'm going to give *Mary-Ellen* a haircut. I'm going to cut off her head!"

"Mary-Ellen heard that," Katie replied.

"You'll be sorry," Amanda added.

They slipped back to their room down the hall. It took me hours to get back to sleep. "Maybe I will cut the doll's head off," I told myself. "It certainly would improve her looks. . ."

On Saturday afternoon, I was up in my room, waiting for my friend Harrison to show up. Bright sunlight streamed in through the open window. A pretty autumn day.

"Jillian — It's time to go!" I heard Amanda call from out in the hall.

"Yee! Time to go! Time to go!" Katie and Amanda began to chant. "Time to go! Time to go!"

Why do six-year-olds like to chant everything?

"Hey -- give me a break!" I held my hands over my ears.

I ignored their cries and gazed into the mirror. I have straight black hair and round green eyes. I'm tall and very thin. I'm the tallest girl in the sixth grade. Sometimes Dad calls me Noodle because I'm so thin and straight.

Guess how much I like that.

The twins are tall and thin and dark-haired too. Katie pulls her hair back in a pony-tail. Amanda usually lets her hair hang over her shoulders.

But I still have trouble telling them apart. Until they talk. Katie is the one with the squeaky voice. She is the crazy one. She is always wired!

Amanda is usually a lot cooler, a lot calmer, a lot quieter and more thoughtful.

Except for now. They were both tugging at me, pulling me to the door, chanting, "Time to go! Time to go!"

"Go where?" I cried.

Mom swept into the room, carrying a pile of clean T-shirts. She set them down on my bed, then made a face at Petey. She hates him too.

"Jillian, have you forgotten about taking your sisters to the Little Theatre?" she demanded.

"Oh, no!" I wailed. "I *had* forgotten!"

Weeks ago, I'd promised the twins I'd take them to see the ventriloquist show at the Saturday matinee.

"You *have* to take us!" Katie squeaked. She tugged my arm so hard, my shoulder cracked.

"You *have* to!" Amanda repeated.

"But I'm meeting Harrison," I protested to Mum. Harrison lives down the block. We've been best friends ever since I made him eat a whole bowl of mud in first grade.

That was five years ago. So far, Harrison hasn't done anything to pay me back. I think he's waiting for the right moment.

Mum squinted hard at me. Her no-nonsense look. "You promised them, and you are taking them—*now!*" she ordered.

The twins exploded in a deafening cheer.

"Take Harrison with you," Mum added. "I'm sure he'll enjoy the show."

Yeah. Of course. About as much as eating mud.

Mum squinted at me even harder. "Jillian, you want to make money entertaining kids at birthday parties—right?"

"Right," I replied.

"So maybe you'll get some good ideas at this show," Mum said.

groaned. "Mum I want to be a clown. Not a stupid ventriloquist."

Mum went close to me. "You promised them." she whispered.

"Okay, okay. We're going." I said.

The twins cheered again.

"Actually Harrison likes this kind of stuff." I added. "He'll probably think the show is amazing."

"If Harrison is coming then Mary-Elise has to come too!" Katie cried.

"Yes!" Amanda agreed. "Mary-Elise wants to see the ventriloquist."

"No way!" I protested. "There's no way in taking that big, ugly monster!"

Amanda disappeared across the hall into the room she and Katie share. A few seconds later she was back dragging the big doll. "Mary-Elise says she has to come with us!"

"But but ..." I sputtered. "She's too big. I'll have to buy a ticket for her. She will have to have her own seat!"

"I'll hold her in my lap!" Katie cried.

"No, I'll hold her!" Amanda insisted.

"I'm not taking her." I insisted. I glanced at the clock on the mantelpiece. "Put the doll down and let's go." I said. I picked up my bag.

Amanda didn't move. She hugged the big doll. "I'm not going unless Mary-Elise goes too!"

"I'm not going, either." Katie croaked in her scratchy voice.

"Okay, okay." I sighed. I could see that I wasn't going to win this argument. "You can bring the doll."

They both chuckled. They love winning. And since they are spoilt brats and almost always win, they have a lot of practice cheating.

A deafening sound — a shrill whistle — blared through the room. "What is that?" I cried.

"You know. It's your dad," Mum replied.

Another shrill whistle made me cover my ears.

"He's down in his workshop." Mum sighed. "Still sewing away at that coffee table."

He's been building that table for six months, said.

"I'm sure it will be beautiful when it's finished." Mum glanced at the clock. "You're really going to be late."

"Come on, you two," I said. "Let's go and see this show."

"Mary-Elton too!" Katie reminded me.

"I know. I know." I groaned.

She swung the big doll around. Her heavy plastic hand slapped me in the face. "Hey!" I cried out angrily.

"Mary-Elton did it. Not me!" Katie insisted. She stuck out her tongue at me.

Harrison was just walking up the driveway. He's very big. Not chubby. Just big. Big head.

big chest big muscular arms and legs. He has
a round face dark serious eyes and short dark
hair

"What's up?" he called.

"We're going to a ventriloquist show," I told
him "All of us."

"Cool," he replied

I knew he'd like it

I thought I'd be bored to tears.

And I was right about that. But here's what I
didn't know

I didn't know this show would ruin our lives

3

"When does it start? When does it start?" The twins bounced in their seats. Mary-Elton bounced on Katie's lap. She swung to the side, and I got a mouthful of frizzy doll's hair.

We had great seats in the centre of the third row. I gazed round. The Little Theatre used to be an old cinema. Now it's used mainly for kids' plays.

The wide stage rose above us with its faded red curtain. The old cinema had had two balconies at the back. But now they're closed off. The rest of the seats are either torn or broken. But the kids didn't seem to mind.

Hundreds of little kids jammed the theatre. They were all shouting and bouncing up and down, like Katie and Amanda, eager for the show to start.

A few rows behind us, a little red-haired girl was crying her eyes out. A boy in a bright yellow sweater was being dragged up the aisle by

his mother. She had a handkerchief pressed against his nose, trying to stop a nosebleed.

I turned to Harrison. "Wow. Fun, huh?" I said, rolling my eyes.

He grinned at me. "I think ventriloquists are cool."

Harrison is a weird boy. He never complains. He thinks everything is cool.

Sometimes I think he's from the moon.

I felt something bounce off my neck. I spun around. The twins were throwing popcorn at each other. "You're wasting all your popcorn, I told them."

"Mary-Ellen wants her own bag," Katie whined. "Go and buy a bag for Mary-Ellen."

"No way," I replied. "You can share with her."

"When does the show start? I'm bored," Amanda whined.

"Mary-Ellen is bored too," Katie added.

I ignored them and turned to Harrison. "Remember about next Saturday night?" I asked him.

He squinted his round dark eyes at me. "Huh?"

"Hel-lo!" I knocked on his head. "Anyone is there? We've talked about it a hundred times, remember? How you're going to help me entertain at the birthday party?"

"Oh. Yeah." He scratched his short hair. "We're clowns, right?"

"We have to practice our act," I told him. "I want to be really funny. It's my first job. And Mrs Hanly is paying me thirty dollars."

"Paying us thirty dollars," Harrison corrected me.

"We don't have enough popcorn!" Katie interrupted. "Mary-Ellen needs her own bag. Go and get it, Jillian. Hurry!" She pushed the bag doll in my face.

I couldn't take any more. I lost it.

"Get that ugly thing away from me!" I shrieked. I slapped Mary-Ellen across the face. The doll's head snapped back.

Startled, Katie pulled the doll down into her lap. She sneered at me and stuck out her tongue.

Music blared from the loudspeakers. "Boys and girls, ladies and gentlemen!" a deep voice boomed. "Please welcome Jimmy O'James and his good friend Happy!"

The music swelled, and the kids all clapped and cheered. Grinning and bowing, the ventriloquist walked out in front of the red curtain, carrying his dummy on his arm.

Jimmy O'James dropped down on the tall stool in the centre of the stage. He was young. He didn't look much older than the teenage babysitters we get for the twins.

Big and broad-shouldered, he wore a black turtle-neck sweater over black trousers. He had

short brown hair and a hog smile that appeared to be frozen on his face. He never stopped smiling!

Slappy the dummy also had a smile all down his face. His round blue eyes shut rapidly from side to side, as if he was checking the audience.

Slappy had a wave of brown hair that stood straight up on his head. He was dressed in a red-and-white-checked sports jacket that reminded me of a tablecloth. A white shirt with a red-and-white bow tie. He had baggy grey slacks and black shoes very big and very shiny.

I glanced at the twins. They were sitting up alertly, silent at last, staring up at the stage. Mary-ellen was perched on Elsie's lap.

"Hello, everyone," the ventriloquist began. "I want you to meet my friend Slappy."

Slappy's red-painted mouth ead up and down. "Are we friends?" he asked. He had a shrill, little-boy voice. "Are we really friends, Jimmy?"

"Of course we are," the ventriloquist replied. "You and I are best friends, Slappy."

"Then would you do a best friend a favour?" Slappy asked sweetly.

"Of course," Jimmy replied. "What favour?"

"Could you take your hand out of my back?"

Slappy growled.

The kids in the audience laughed. I saw Harrison laughing too.

"I'm afraid I can't do that," Jimmy said. "You see, you and I are very close friends."

Slappy tilted his head. "Very close friends? How close? Can you give me a kiss?"

"I don't think so," Jimmy replied.

"Why not?" Slappy demanded in a tiny voice.

"I don't want to get splinters!" Jimmy declared.

The kids all laughed. Kate and Amanda thought that was very funny.

Suddenly, Slappy's voice changed. "You don't want to kiss me? Well, I don't want to kiss you, either. Here's a riddle for you, Jimmy," he growled. His voice came out gruff and hoarse. "What's the difference between a skunk and your breath?"

"I — I don't know," Jimmy stammered.

"I don't know, either!" Slappy barked.

The kids in the audience laughed. But I saw Jimmy's smile fade. From our third-row seats, I could see beads of sweat form on his forehead.

"Slappy — be nice," he scolded. "You promised me you wouldn't do that."

"Here's another riddle for you, Jimmy," the dummy growled.

"No, please. No more riddles," the ventriloquist pleaded. He suddenly looked really upset. I knew it was all an act. But why was Jimmy O'James pretending to be so nervous?

"What do your face and a plate of creamed corn have in common?" Slappy asked.

"I don't like this riddle," Jimmy protested. He forced his smile back. He turned to the audience. "Hey kids, tell Slappy."

"What do your face and a plate of creamed corn have in common?" Slappy rasped.

The ventriloquist sighed. "I don't know. What?"

"They both look like corn!" Slappy screamed. Everyone laughed.

Jimmy O'James laughed too. But I saw more sweat pour down his forehead. "Very funny, Slappy. But no more riddles. Be nice, or I'll have a new job for you."

"New job?" Slappy asked. "What new job?"

"I get you a job as a crash test dummy."

"Ho-ho. Round me to laugh!" Slappy growled. "You're about as funny as stomach cramps."

"Slappy — please. Give me a break," Jimmy pleaded.

Suddenly, Slappy turned sweet again. "Want to hear a compliment?" he asked. "Can I give you a compliment, Jimmy?"

The ventriloquist added, "A compliment? Yes. That's better. Let's hear it."

"YOU STINK!" Slappy shrieked.

Jimmy looked hurt. "That's not a compliment," he said.

"I know I lied!" Slappy exclaimed. He threw back his head and opened his mouth in a scornful laugh.

Katie and Amanda were on the edge of their seats, leaning over the seats in front of them, laughing. I turned and saw that Harrison was laughing too.

"This man is really funny," Harrison said. "That dummy has a bogus attitude!"

"Yeah, I suppose so," I replied.

"You can't even see the ventriloquist's lip move," Harrison said. "He's pretty amazing."

"Jimmy, you should be on the dollar bill," Slappy was saying. "Because your face is all green and wrinkled!"

The boys laughed and slapped the seats in front of them.

"Or maybe you should be on the penny!" Slappy screamed. "Know why? Know why? Because you're practically worthless! You're worthless, Jimmy! Worthless!"

Sweat poured down Jimmy O'James's forehead. He clenched his teeth and shut his eyes as the dummy screamed at him.

"Why does Jimmy look so unhappy so upset?" I wondered.

"Why does he look so afraid?"

4

"Let's stop the insults and talk to some of the kids," Jimmy suggested to the dummy. "You'll be nice to the kids, won't you?"

"Of course," Slappy replied. "I'm a nice guy."

The ventriloquist stood up and leaned over the front of the stage. "Who would like to come up and meet Slappy?"

Dozens of hands shot up. Before I realized what was happening, Katie and Amanda were pushing to the side. Then they went running on to the stage. Katie dragged Mary-Ellen with her.

"Oh, wow," I murmured. "This should be interesting."

"That doll is almost as big as you are!" Jimmy O'James exclaimed.

Slappy leaned down towards Mary-Ellen. "You're pretty," he told the doll. "Pretty ugly."

The audience laughed hard. My little sisters

didn't laugh. Katie struggled to hold up the big doll.

"So you're twins, huh?" Slappy growled. "What do you call yourselves? The Gruesome Twins?"

Slappy threw back his head and let out a high-pitched giggle. A few kids in the audience laughed. But most of them didn't think that was funny.

"I bet you share everything, don't you?" Slappy said to my sisters. "Which one of you is using the brain today?"

Slappy laughed again. Jimmy grabbed him with both hands and shook him. "Stop it Slappy!" he screamed angrily. "Stop insulting the kids!"

"They love it!" Slappy declared. "They love me — and hate you!"

I leant forward, my heart pounding. Katie and Amanda looked really unhappy. Why was the ventriloquist making Slappy say those nasty things to them?

Beakle me, Harrison was laughing hard. "This man is a riot!" he declared.

"I don't think it's very funny," I confessed.

"Girls, I think you're a lot like Niagara Falls," Slappy growled.

Katie and Amanda exchanged confused glances.

"Slappy, you say they're like Niagara Falls,

the waterfall?" Jimmy asked. "Why do you say that?"

"They're both big drips!" Slappy cried.

"That's not very nice!" Katie protested.

The audience grew silent.

"Girls, I think you'd better go back to your seats," Jimmy O'Samus said, shaking his head. "Slappy isn't in a very good mood today."

The girls turned and hurried off the stage. Katie tripped and nearly dropped Mary-Elise.

"Get your doll a flea collar!" Slappy called after them.

The girls pushed their way back through the row and plopped into their seats. Katie scowled angrily. Amanda shook her head. I could see she was blushing.

Katie leaned over to talk to me. "That was really nasty," she whispered.

"He wasn't funny," Amanda added. I could see teardrops form in the corners of her eyes. "I . . . I was so embarrassed."

"I wasn't embarrassed. I was just angry," Katie whispered.

Two teardrops rolled down Amanda's cheeks. Katie never cries. But Amanda cries if you look at her funny.

"That's just his act," I told them. "Some people think insults are funny. If I was up there and Slappy said those things about me, you'd laugh your heads off."

They didn't reply. They settled back in their chairs, and we watched the rest of the show. Amanda stared up at the stage, frowning, her arms crossed over her chest. Katie hugged Mary-ellen tightly. Neither girl smiled once.

Harrison was the only one who seemed to enjoy the show. "Being a ventriloquist looks like fun," he told me. "You get to say horrible things to people — and everyone blames the dummy!"

The ventriloquist finished his act with a song. He sang one line, and then Blappy sang the other.

"Let's all show our appreciation for Jimmy O'James and his funny friend Blappy!" a voice boomed from off-stage.

Everyone clapped and cheered. Everyone but Katie and Amanda.

Then we started to make our way along the row to the exits. Katie and Amanda led the way. "Sorry you didn't enjoy the show," I said to them.

"We're going to tell that ventriloquist he's nasty," Katie declared.

"Excuse me?" It was so noisy in the big theatre, I wasn't sure I'd heard her correctly.

"We're going to tell him he shouldn't do that to kids," Amanda said.

"He isn't funny at all," Katie complained. "And we think he should say he's sorry."

"No, wait —" I started.

They pushed their way into the crowded aisle
Everyone was heading for the exits. The girls
turned the other way and scooted towards the
stage.

"Wait!" I cried. "I don't think that's a good
idea!" Hey Katie? Amanda? Come back!"

"Too late. I saw them pull open a little door at
the side of the stage and disappear behind it.

5

I stopped short. Harrison bumped right into me.

"Ow!" He's so big. It was like being bumped into by an elephant.

"Sorry," he muttered. "Where did your sisters go?"

I pointed to the door beside the stage.

"But everyone is leaving!" he cried.

"They went to talk to the ventriloquist," I told him. I had to shout over the loud voices of the kids. Two little boys scooted in front of me, making karate chops at each other as they ran.

I grabbed the sleeve of Harrison's T-shirt. "Come on. Help me find them," I said.

I tugged him to the door and pulled it open. We both tried to go through at once -- and got jammed together in the doorway.

"Haven't you had enough comedy for one day?" I wailed.

I stepped back and I moved through the doorway. We found ourselves in a long, narrow hallway. I squinted into the darkness, but I could barely see a thing.

"Weird," Harrison muttered. His voice echoed off the concrete walls. "It's like a tunnel. Are you sure that was the stage door?"

"How should I know?" I snapped. "I just know the girls went in here."

We started walking into the hall. I trailed one hand along the wall. Harrison stayed close beside me.

"Where are they?" I cried. My voice echoed. "They couldn't have gone far."

"Hey — Kate? Amanda?" Harrison called.

We stopped and listened. No reply.

"They're always doing this to me!" I declared through gritted teeth. "Remember when they disappeared after the circus? I was so worried. I was so scared they were hurt or hurt or something. I searched and searched for them. And they were hiding in the wooden stands, watching me the whole time!"

"Kate? Amanda?" Harrison's voice boomed down the long, dark hallway.

Silence.

"Why don't they have any lights back here?" Harrison demanded. "If this is the stage door —"

"YAAAAH!!!!" I let out a scream as something soft and scratchy wrapped around my arm.

Harrison spun round. "Julian what is it?" he cried.

I shook my hand hard. I scraped at it with my other hand.

"A spider's web!" I choked out. "Yuck. As quick as a shot!" I struggled to pull it off me. "Ohhh!" I uttered a low moan. My whole body prickled and itched.

"This can't be the stage entrance," Harrison muttered.

"Katie? Amanda?" I shrieked. "They're probably hiding," I told Harrison. "I'm going to kill them this time. I really am."

Harrison suddenly grabbed my arm. Julian duck!"

I lowered my head. More cobwebs hung down from the ceiling.

The tunnel curved to the right. We stepped into a wash of grey light. I heard voices up ahead.

"Hey!" I called. "Katie? Amanda? Where are you?"

I heard a girl laugh. But it didn't sound like one of my sisters.

"I think the dressing-rooms must be back here," Harrison said. We passed a door marked STAGE VIEW ONLY and then a door with the word PROPS stencilled at the top.

heard a woman yell, "Hurry up!"

And then two boys laughed and hung part of a song.

We started to jog. I knew we were getting close.

"Killed Amanda?" I called. "You'd better not be talking from me!"

The hall split into two narrower hallways. Harrison and I stopped and stared in both directions. The hall that led to the right was brightly lit. I started to lead the way to it — but then I heard voices in the other hall.

"Let's split up," I said. I pointed to the right. "Take that one. If you find them, drag them to the front of the theatre. I'll meet you there."

I trotted into the hall on the left. "Take no prisoners!" I heard Harrison call. Then he disappeared from sight.

I moved quickly past doors with stars' names stencilled on them. These must be the dressing-rooms, told myself.

I slowed down when I heard voices up ahead.

"You promised me —" a man whined.

Light spilled out from a door opened halfway. I crept up to it.

"You can't do that to me!" the man continued. He sounded very angry, very frantic.

"You're blowing hot air on me!" another voice replied. A shrill, tiny voice. Slappy's voice!

I crept up to the half-open door. Keeping myself hidden, I waned my head forward and peeked inside.

"You ruined everything!" Jimmy O'James cried angrily. He held Slappy on his arms, just as he had on-stage. "You really hurt me. I mean it. You hurt me."

"Your face hurts me!" the dummy spat back.

What's going on here? I wondered. I took a step closer. I leaned into the doorway.

They really seemed to be arguing. But that was impossible!

Why on earth was the ventriloquist doing this?

Jimmy O'James took a long drink from a bottle of water. "I can't let you do this!" he spluttered. "I have to stop it . . . now."

The dummy let out a low growl. "Stop this!" he grunted.

And to my shock, the dummy swung his arm — hard.

His wooden fist slammed against the ventriloquist's face.

Jimmy O'James staggered back. He grabbed his nose. Blood trickled down his chin.

Huh? I gaped in amazement. The dummy had given him a bloody nose!

Something is wrong here, I told myself.

Something is very wrong.

raised my eyes - and tried out
Jimmy James was staring at the doorway
he saw me

6

The ventriloquist's eyes bulged

The dummy turned too. Slappy's mouth dropped open. Then his head drooped, and his whole body collapsed.

Jimmy O'James set Slappy down on a table. Then he turned back to me. "I didn't see you there," he said. His dark eyes studied me. He grabbed a tissue off the table and wiped at his bleeding nose.

"He—he hit you?" I stammered, pointing at Slappy.

"Huh?" The ventriloquist glanced at Slappy, then shook his head. "No. He didn't hit me. He slipped from my arm, and his hand bumped into me. That's all."

"But—but I saw you arguing!" I sputtered.

Jimmy O'James sniggered. "I was just rehearsing. Just practicing. I'm doing another show with Slappy tonight." He dabbed at his nose with the tissue.

I felt so confused. "I'm sorry," I said. "I thought . . ."

. . . just a dummy. The ventriloquist said, "He said so."

I gazed at Shapiro, feeling an incredible. He'd looked quite cute enough a few days ago, but his crooked, painted-on-a-and-who-oh-ohing eyes. Even though he smiled, his expression appeared angry almost cruel.

. . . thought you were fighting with him into coming to dance.

I lowered the tissue and asked, "I suppose that makes me a great ventriloquist?" He said, "Geez. 'Are you lost or something?'"

Oh, so I suddenly remembered why I had wandered back there. "My mother ran away with him. They were pecking for you. Haven't you seen them?"

. . . took the hand. Mr. Kibade

. . . asked him. . . . said, "Sorry. Saturated you. . . . on the driveway."

"No problem," the ventriloquist called after me.

"No problem," a shrill voice called. "Shapiro was a"

Found the twins at a water fountain near the entrance in the back of the lobby. "I rushed up to get your dresses. . . . We been searching all over for you. . . . Who are you doing for?"

"Giving Mary-Ellen a drink." Katie replied. She and Amanda held the big doll up to the fountain and squirted water on her face.

"You shouldn't have run away." I scolded.

"We didn't! We walked!" Katie insisted. "We got lost in a long tunnel and ended up here."

I grabbed each of them by an arm. "Come on. Let's go home."

"But Mary-Ellen is still drinking!" Amanda cried.

"And we're not going home." Katie added.

"Excuse me? What do you mean?" I demanded.

"You promised you'd take us for ice-cream," Katie replied. She tossed her pony-tail over her shoulder. "You promised."

"Okay, okay." I muttered. The lobby was nearly empty. The overhead lights were dim. "Have you seen Harrison?" I asked.

"He was talking to some people," Amanda reported. She slung the big doll over her shoulder. The doll's face was dripping wet.

"He probably met some friends," I said. "Come on. Let's go."

I took them to the Dairy Queen on the corner. We had chocolate-vanilla swirl cones. They made me buy one for Mary-Ellen too.

We sat in a booth in the corner and they pretended to feed it to her. They talked to

Mary- Ellen the whole time and never said a word to me.

Do you understand why I hate that doll? Ever since I had brought the ugly thing home from a garden sale, she seems to be completely against me. And they say the doll is driving me crazy.

Mary- Ellen like the stupid old woman had the vanilla, having reported.

I said, "Can't we talk about something else?" Well, sure, sure, when Mrs. Peters does.

She ignored me and pretended as if her favorite ice-cream I "hecked" my watch. The whole day had been wasted! I had a couple of hours' work to do. And I wanted to call some friends to see what they were doing tonight.

I finally got finished my work. They had made my room on my face. Then in their pajamas. Mary- Ellen said to look a whole packet of napkins to get them cleaned up.

Then I pretended and a drag down some new best shopping and printing out houses and over a year. Mary- Ellen took papers to walk four checks!

By the way we reached home I wanted a tear that did hurt. Tear her apart and over her piece in the bin.

The girls hurried to find them. I was so glad

to get away from them. I made my way into the
living-room.

And stopped with a gasp.

Slappy was sitting on the sofa!

T

I let out a sharp cry

"How how did you get here?" I stammered

The dummy stared back at me with that crooked smile and those cold eyes

Then he sniggered. His laugh started softly then grew louder

I gasped. This isn't happening, I told myself.

Harrison popped up from behind the sofa. His dark eyes flashed gleefully. He was grinning so hard. I thought his face would break!

"William, did you really think the dummy was laughing?" Harrison demanded

"No. Of course not!" I lied

"Then why did you talk to him?" Harrison asked

I stepped up to the sofa. "Where did you get that thing?" I cried. "What is he doing here?"

"He followed me home," Harrison laughed.

"No. Really." I insisted

The dummy stared up at me from the sofa. Close up, I could see small cracks in his forehead. His painted hair was chipped. Pieces of the red-brown paint had flaked off.

He had a small chunk of wood missing from his bottom lip. His checked sports jacket was frayed. Two buttons were missing.

"Yuck. He's so ugly," I declared.

"You're cute too," Slappy shot back.

No, Harrison pretending to be Slappy.

"Stop it," I snapped. "You're not funny. Now answer my question. How did this dummy get here?"

Harrison dropped down on the arm of the sofa. He pushed the dummy, and Slappy fell up to his side.

"At the theatre. I met some kids from school," Harrison began. "They were working on the stage crew. Helping out backstage at the ventriloquist show. I couldn't find your sisters. So I hung out with them for a while."

"So?" I asked. "Then what?" It always takes Harrison years to tell a two-minute story!

Harrison picked up the dummy's shiny black shoe. Then he let it fall back to the sofa. "I went looking for you," he continued. "But I couldn't find you. I suppose you'd already left."

"I had to take the girls for ice-cream," I sighed.

"So I talked to my friends some more. Then

went out of the house. Through the back door."

He shifted his weight to the sofa and "opened" a new can. There was a whole load of dumplings on the side of the house. He had been at the front of the house and was stopped at the door.

But he was not a negligible crowd. He was in company. He was throw away his dumplings."

He began to shudder. "I probably has a lot of dumplings. This one looks pretty old. Maybe he's broken in something."

"Yeah, maybe," said

He reached down to examine him.

And he clamped his jaws down hard on my hand.

"Let go!" shrieked. "Let go! I'm not let go!"



I tugged my hand back as hard as I could. But the wooden jaws bit into my skin.

"Ow! Help me!" I cried.

I raised my free hand and struggled to pull down the dummy's chin. My trapped hand throbbed with pain.

"I don't believe this!" I moaned.

"Stop pulling!" Harrison ordered. "Silkian, stop for a moment."

He reached across me and grabbed the dummy's face with both hands. Then he pulled the mouth open, wide enough for me to slip my hand out.

"I told you he was broken," Harrison said.

I shook my hand, trying to shake away the pain. I had deep purple tooth marks where the dummy had bitten me.

"Wow. That was fierce!" I declared, examining my hand. "I think I was more surprised than

nothing. I didn't even touch his mouth
about my hand came up to me.

He's definitely broken. Last night repeated
staring down at the dummy. He gazed back up
a thin blanket. He is so in pain. Beg with
eyes. Now.

"What's wrong, a heart?" I asked. The skin on his
neck was red and white and raw. He
trembled with pain. "How? Tell me. You
won't ask me to ask the doctor about it."

"No way," I insisted, protested. He grabbed at
the blanket. He is in pain. "Don't. Don't. Don't
do it. Don't do it. He is in pain. Don't do it.
He is in pain. Don't do it. He is in pain. Don't do it."

We should ask Tommy. Tommy is a doctor.
He is in pain. He is in pain. He is in pain. He is in pain.

We can't know where Tommy was
because he is in pain.

reaching for the dummy's pocket. "What's
there?" he left me. "What's there?"

A slip of wrinkled paper fluttered out of the
pocket and with it the sofa. I picked it up and
examined it.

"Is it the vermin's address?" I asked.
asked.

No. I told him. "He wants to know how to
foreign words."

He is in pain. He is in pain. He is in pain. He is in pain.

I started to read the strange words on the tiny slip of paper: "*Korra marri odonna —*"

"Jillian — time for dinner!" Mum's voice rang out from the dining-room.

I didn't finish reading the strange words. "Sorry. Got to eat," I told Harrison. I stuffed the slip of paper back into Slappy's jacket pocket.

"Come on, Jillian — before it gets cold!" Mum called.

"Coming!" I shouted.

Harrison was straightening Slappy's bow tie. I noticed he was being very careful to keep his hands away from the dummy's mouth.

"Hey — I have an idea," he said. "Your dad loves repair projects — right? If I leave Slappy here, do you think he might fix him?"

I stared hard at the grinning dummy. "Maybe," I replied. "I could ask him."

"Cool! Thanks, Jillian!" Harrison set Slappy down on the sofa. Then he hurried home.

I stepped into the dining-room — and let out an angry cry. "Not again!"

The twins had propped up Mary-Ellen in the chair beside me. They both giggled. They knew I hated having to sit next to that big, ugly doll at dinner.

"Do we have to have that thing at the table?" I asked Mum and Dad.

Dad shrugged. He was busy trying to pull a wooden splinter from his thumb. He refused to

went work gloves down on top work top but a constant yapping splat.

"The doll won't get it your way," he said and me. "She isn't doing any harm."

Mary Ellen looked white but not as white as she declared with a sneer. "But she *is* *stitch*!"

"Katie, stop it," Mum scolded. "Stop your pester. Also you *is* a show today! You should be nice to her."

"The show *is* at ten. Auntie's mother's."

But your mother and three before it gets to the show and I saw that Mary-Ellen has her own plate of impatience. Mum was as bad as the twins. Why is he always have to give it to anything Katie and Amanda want?

When it came to the school bag of mine or Harry's, then he would take it to school at last after he'd finished the coffee and he was reading.

Mum asked the twins about the workbooks they show. But they ignored her. They were busy having a conversation with Mary Ellen.

When I asked them to pass the doll, they ignored me too. They kept on talking to the doll.

I sighed and turned to Mum. "Can you stop them from talking to that doll all the time? It's driving me nuts."

"You talk to your *Heard!*" Katie accused. "You talk to that gross *Heard* all the time."

"And Mary-Ellen is *never* than a *Heard!*" Amanda declared.

"I just wanted you to *pass the salt!*" I screamed.

Katie pressed her hands over her ears. "Stop yelling," she whined. "Mary-Ellen doesn't like yelling."

"That hurt Mary-Ellen's ears," Amanda added. "Apologize to Mary-Ellen, Jillian."

"Yeah. Apologize to Mary-Ellen," Katie insisted.

"AAAAAAGGGH"

I couldn't take it any more. I let out a scream. Then I grabbed Mary-Ellen's big head and shoved it down into her plate of macaroni.

After dinner, I carried Blappy up to my room and sat down at my desk to do some homework. But I couldn't concentrate. I felt the dummy's dark, cold eyes on me. And I kept glancing up at his crooked grin.

Finally, I turned the dummy to face the wall. That helped a little. I did some work. Then I called some friends and chatted for a while. Then I went to bed.

But I couldn't sleep. I kept thinking about the twins at dinner and how furious they'd made me. They drove me bananas with that doll

Then Mum and I climbed a ladder to my window
sneaking in.

Was that fair? Not at all.
It's payback for the teacher who said I'd be
revenge.

How many nights have I put myself in a
young stream up a good revenge plan.

One up. Tonight I have to do something
for myself I suddenly had an idea. It made me
chuckle a little.

But Mum and Amanda always keep their fingers
by the front door. They slip down on as
hard as they can in the morning.

On going to school downstairs and
their faces into huge knots. I decided
enough was enough. I'm a really good knot
tied. I planned to tie up their knots in the
morning. They'd never get out of bed. They'd
have to cut the knots off with a pair of
scissors.

Now I know. It wasn't the cleverest plan in
history. And it wasn't much revenge for all the
things they'd done to me.

But it was a start.

I stood up and straightened my nightgown.
Then I slipped downstairs in the dark to play my
little trick.

I stopped halfway down. He swore I heard a
soft thud. A scraping sound. The squeak of
floorboards.

Who is downstairs? I wondered. Are Mum and Dad still up?

I pushed my hair off my forehead. Gripping the banister I made my way down the rest of the way.

Again, I heard the soft thuds of footsteps and the squeak of the living-room floor.

"Who's there?" I whispered, "Who is down here?"

I squinted into the dark living-room.

And saw two eyes staring back at me. Staring hard without moving, without blinking.

"Who's there?" I repeated, the words catching in my throat.

No reply.

My hand fumbled against the wall until I found the light switch. I clicked on the ceiling light.

And saw Slappy sitting in an armchair, his legs crossed. His hands were folded together in his lap.

"Huh?" My mouth dropped open as I stared across the room at him.

And then he growled, "Go back to sleep!"



"Dinner!" belted a loud man and pressed my hands to my mouth.

"The dummy cooked!"

"My heart buckles! The man faded in and out of focus."

The dummy stared coldly at me from his chair.

And then I heard giggling. And a rustling behind the armchair.

"You going with you both," I cried, my voice full stinky.

Kate and Amanda popped out from behind the chair. They were laughing and congratulating each other and slapping each other high fives.

"A-ha! So you fooled me, Big deal," said, rolling my eyes.

"We scared you to death!" Kate boasted.

"You really scough," the dummy cackled. Amanda choked on

"Maybe I did and maybe I didn't," I stowed.
"It wasn't very nice. What's the big idea?"

"Mary-Ellen told us to scare you," Katie replied.

"You pushed Mary-Ellen's face in macaroni and now she hates you," Amanda declared.

"Well, I hate her too!" I cried. "Hate her! Hate her! Hate her!"

I suppose I completely lost my head. The girls' smiles faded. They suddenly looked frightened. They enjoy playing tricks on me. But they get scared when I go completely ballistic.

"Jillian, can we tell you something?" Katie asked in a tiny voice.

"It's important," Amanda added, her expression solemn now.

"Not!" I cried. "No way! No more tricks!"

I grabbed Slappy by the waist and pulled him off the armchair.

The dummy's big wooden head fell back. His eyes gazed up at me. The eyes suddenly looked so real. As if they really could see me.

So real and so cold.

The crooked red lips grinned up at me.

I felt a chill run down my back. Was he smiling like that before?

Why did the expression suddenly seem so evil?

"Please?" Can we tell you something?" Katie pleaded in a tiny voice.

"won't take long. A moment and
No I've had enough of you. I'm out
day. snapped the car door open
spun away and sprinted back to the car. trap
ging me during my with the
Please. " Amazon asked.
Please. " Kate asked
on bed I didn't listen to them

10

At school on Monday, Harrison came running up to me in the cafeteria. "Has your dad fixed Slappy?" he demanded.

"You have peanut butter on your chin," I told him.

He wiped it away with his hand. Then he licked his fingers.

"Gross," I complained. "Why are you doing that?"

He shrugged. "I like peanut butter." He followed me to a table. I set down my tray. Harrison plopped down opposite me. "Has your dad fixed the dummy?"

"Not yet," I told him. "He wants to finish his table first. Then he'll get to the dummy." I sighed. "Slappy is already causing me trouble."

Harrison scratched his dark hair. He broke off a piece of my chocolate chip cookie and stuffed it in his mouth. "What kind of trouble?"

"The twins are already using him. A day
waka on me." said Sam

had two slices of pizza in my eye. I hurried
picked up a stick and started to chew

"Help yourself!" said sarcastically

"Your sisters are evil. Or said, taking off a
stick of crust

I rolled my eyes. Tell me about it

"We been thinking about your revenge?" he
said his eyes lighting up "You know. We
should do something to that big ugly doll they
carry around. What's her name? Mary
Margaret?"

"Mary-Elion." I said. I grabbed the other slice
before he could take that one too.

"We could remove the doll's hand." Harrison
demanded. He made twisting motions with both
hands. And put it full of worms. Then sew it
back on."

"Not gross enough." replied. "I like a
smear that doll with horse and feed it as a
bunch of rats."

"That's too kind." Harrison laughed. "What
if we fill the doll with water? Or cut off all her
raty ear and let the twins she just went
out?"

"Not nasty enough." I said

Harrison finished the pizza slice "as does all
you've got for lunch?" he demanded. "I'm still
hungry

I was still thinking about cruel things to do to Mary-Elke. But I decided to change the subject. "Harrison, do you remember where we are going after school?"

His mouth dropped open. "You and me?"

I nodded. "We're going to the magic shop remember? We're going to buy some magic tricks to use in our clown act on Saturday night."

He made a disgusted face. "Yeah. Right," he muttered, resting his chin in his hand. "Our clown act."

"You promised!" I cried. "It's my first birthday party — and you promised you'd help out."

"I really don't want to be a clown," he complained. "I don't think I'm funny."

"You're funny," I told him. "Funny-looking."

He didn't smile. "Is that one of the jokes you're going to use at the party?" he asked glumly.

"We have to practice," I said. "So we'll be funny. We'll buy a load of funny tricks at the shop. The kids will like that."

Harrison sighed. "Remind me why I'm doing this?"

"Because you're my friend," I replied.

"No. What's the real reason?" he demanded.

"Because Mrs. Judy is paying me thirty dollars — and I'm giving you half of it."

"Oh, yeah?" Larsson said, snapping his fingers — "now, it's inevitable."

After an hour we rode our bikes to the magic shop — a toy shop, but also sells comic books and greeting cards and T-shirts.

Larsson and I leaned our bikes against the wall at the side of the building. Above us a red and yellow sign proclaimed: "No dogs, no cats."

Heavy grey clouds rolled over the sun. A dark shadow swept over us as we walked to the front.

"Wait up," Larsson stopped and squatted down to the one of his trainers' wheelchairs.

I turned the corner — and gasped.

"The von Rumpolt? Jimenez? Larsson?"

I recognized him instantly in his black leather neck shirt and black pants. He carried a black bag in his shopping bag. He was two or three steps away, heading for the exit door.

"Hey," I called, "Hi!" I waved at him fearfully.

He turned and narrowed his eyes at me.

"We have your dummy," he said. "We have Supply."

The sinister-looking expression changed. I saw his mouth drop open and his eyes go wide. "Get me out of here, please!" he cried. "Get rid of him before it's too late!"



"Huh? What do you mean?" I cried.

"Jillian—?" Harrison came trotting around the side of the building. I turned back to him. "It's the ventriloquist!" I told him. "He's here! He —"

Harrison gazed past me. "Where?"

I spun back. The ventriloquist had vanished.

"He's gone." I murmured, shaking my head. "I told him we had Slappy. And he said to get rid of him. Get rid of him before it's too late."

Harrison twisted up his face. "What's that supposed to mean? What's his problem?"

I shrugged. "How should I know?"

"He's weird," Harrison said. "He didn't tell you to give him back — did he?"

"Well — no," I replied.

"Good. We're keeping him." Harrison pulled open the door to the shop. We both tried to go in at the same time — and jammed together in the doorway.

play a card game and squirt each other in the face. The kids would like that."

"How about this one?" He pulled another box off the shelf. **REALISTIC OUTLINE**. "The kid puts his head under the blade and—"

"I don't think so." I pulled out a trick from the bottom shelf. **WHIPPED CREAM SURPRISE**. "This could be good," I said. "You fill it up with whipped cream. It looks like a pie. But when someone bends down close to it you squeeze this pump and it squirts the whipped cream in his face."

Harrison laughed. "We'll do an all-squirting act. Squirting stuff is always funny."

"Especially to four year-olds," I added.

We bought the squirting cards and the squirting pie and a few other tricks. I could see that Harrison had a much better attitude. He was starting to get excited about performing at the party.

Maybe we'll be good, I thought. Maybe this party is just the start.

Maybe we'll become the most popular birthday party clowns in town.

Maybe we'll become **RICH** birthday party clowns!

I strapped the shopping bag bulging with magic tricks over my handlebars. And the two of us rode home, talking excitedly about our clown act.

12

Looming over the empty glass cage, the dummy grinned across the room at me.

I dropped to my hands and knees and began frantically searching for the lizard. I crawled from one end of the room to the other, peering under the desk, under my chair, in the wardrobe. I pulled up the bedspread and searched under the bed.

"Pete? Pete --?"

No sign of him.

I climbed to my feet and spun to the bedroom door. It had been wide open when I arrived. Had the lizard crawled into the hall?

I dived out into the hall. Searched up and down.

No lizard.

I heard voices and stuck down the hall. The TV was on in the twins' room. I jerked open the door. Kate and Amanda were sitting on

the floor with Mary-Elan between them.
What was curious about

"Where's her?" shrieked. "What did you do
with her?"

Three squeal round letting out startled cries.
Mary-Elan replied in a low tone:

"What's wrong, Kate? I was a passing visitor
but

"You know what's wrong," she said.
"Where is Percy? Where?"

grabbed Katie by the shoulders and a second
mistake her.

"Stop it! Stop it!" Amanda cried at them
away. "We didn't touch Percy when we stop it."

"Yes, you did," cried. "You put the girls
going to pay for it."

"What's going on?" That's what Amanda
she came from. "The girls were at the
boat and carrying him or else he had
wakened us and work it. I don't know what
or when."

"Auntie, you're of the age," she said. "I
remember seeing you of Katie. This is the
first time you've been."

"I don't know," she said with surprise. "Hullo
+"

"We don't know," Katie and Amanda cried in
unison.

"We didn't touch her," said Amanda.
Auntie

"Really, Dad?" Katie added. "She's crazy! Ow She hurt my arms!" Katie rubbed her shoulders and made a pouty face.

"I'll do worse than that!" I threatened. "Look, Dad."

I dragged him into my room and showed him Slappy and the open, empty cage. The girls came running in. They pretended they hadn't been any of this before.

"I searched everywhere for Patey." I told Dad. "We've got to find him! He can't live very long without food or water."

Dad shook his head sadly. He dropped his briefcase on to my bed and turned to the twins. "You really went too far this time," he told them.

"But we didn't do it!" Katie protested.

"We didn't! We didn't! We didn't!" Amanda chanted.

"Well, the dummy didn't do it." Dad told them sternly. "I don't want any more lies, girls. We tell the truth in this house. I mean it."

Dad turned to me. "Patey has to be somewhere in the house, Jillian. He's slow. He couldn't have gone far. We'll all hunt for him. We'll find him before he starves to death."

"But what if he climbs into a radiator or something?" I asked. "What if we can't find him?"

Before Dad could answer, Mum came burst-

13

"Whoa " , grabbed Dad's arm.

The twins both uttered frightened cries
Slappy's head tilted. His mouth opened wider

And Patsy poked out from between the dummy's lips.

"Huh?" I let out a gasp. I let go of Dad's arm and went running across the room.

The lizard slid his front legs out over Slappy's chin. His head moved from side to side, as if he was glancing around the room.

"Patsy how did you get in there?" I cried
I gently pulled the lizard the rest of the way out of the dummy. Slappy fell heavily off the table and landed on the floor at my feet. I cradled Patsy tenderly in my hands and turned back to Mum and Dad.

"He's okay," I reported.

My parents were both still frozen in shock
Finally Mum opened her eyes and let out a long

whoosh of air. "Whooooooww! Glad that's over."

Paul sighed and stretched his hand against his eyes. "I thought the dummy was moving!" he exclaimed. "What a scare!"

The winds were quelled by my law. "We didn't do it," Amanda said softly. "Really didn't."

"Of course you did," Mum snapped. She pressed her hands against her eyes and gazed angrily at them. "There's no one else in the house. Didn't do it. And your father didn't do it. He would have told us!"

"But, but..." both girls spluttered.

"But we wouldn't cry to tell a live animal," Kate finally choked out.

Mum shook her head. "This was a terrible thing. Not a joke. I want both of you to go and get Mary Ellen." Mum ordered. "Put the doll away in your wardrobe."

"But Mum..." Kate started.

"Put the doll in the wardrobe," Mum repeated sternly. "You can't bring her out again until you tell the truth about what you do... and speaking to a million."

"But Mary Ellen won't let us put her in the wardrobe," Kate protested.

"We can't put her away," Amanda insisted. "We can't!"

Mum just stared at her in reply. She turned

to me "Jillman, go and put Mary-Ellen away in their wardrobe. Now."

The girls continued to protest.

I set Petey down carefully in the glass cage. He seemed perfectly fine. I think he probably enjoyed his exciting adventure.

The cage lid was cracked. But it still fitted over the top of the cage. I made sure it was as tight.

Then I made my way into the twins' room. Mary Ellen was sitting on the floor in front of the TV. I heaved the big dol' over my shoulder and started to the wardrobe.

"No! Please!"

Katie and Amanda burst in in front of me. "Please don't put her in there!"

"Mum said," I replied quietly. I jammed the dol' on to the top shelf where the girls couldn't reach her. Then I closed the wardrobe door. "If you want her back, just tell the truth," I instructed them.

I hurried back to my room and shut the door. Petey was moving around in the cage. Back to normal.

I shook my head, thinking about Katie and Amanda. They were always pulling nasty tricks on me. They both definitely had a cruel streak.

The hourcat in the middle of the night was pretty bad. But this was even worse.

Revenge. The word burst into my mind. I'd

even planning for so long to pay 'em back for
all their sweet tricks

Sim was his name But what could I do? What
would be the perfect revenge?

Used to imagine them sneaking into my
room, 'tilting 'em over his nose, dropping
Slappy over the edge And sitting me down
and me doubling a mouth

Here I believe

And then another picture flashed into my
mind.

I pictured myself standing in the dark hall at
the door Then to suicide dummy I entered
dressing-room Watching the ventriloquist
argue with me dummy

And once again I pictured Slappy swinging
his arm and slapping his fist over the ventrilo-
quist's nose

Impossible I told myself That could happen
gazed down at Slappy who squatted on my
bedroom floor His dark eyes stared blindly up
at me

I felt a chill

"I'm moving you away now," I told him

He's driven to pick the dummy up and
once again, his jaws snapped down on my hand.

"How?" he gasped a cry And struggled to prise
my hand loose

He isn't biting me I told myself

The jaws are just stuck Just stuck

14

I slapped the knees of my baggy, polka-dot costume and laughed. "You look amazing!"

Harrison growled at me. He scratched the ball of red hair on the top of his bald head. His face was white except for the big, painted black mouth that swept from one big rubber ear to the other. His eyes were also ringed by huge black circles.

"I'll never forgive you for this, Jillian," he said. The blue ruffle around his neck hopped up and down as we walked. "I just hope we don't run into any kids we know."

We made our way up the Healy gravel driveway, dragging our bag of tricks with us. I was the happy clown, and Harrison was the sad clown. Mum and Dad had both worked for days on the costumes.

Dad had wanted to build mechanical arms that would pop out from our sides. Mum convinced him we wouldn't be able to move

all of with heavy machinery under our own
eyes.

As we stepped on to the front doorstep, my
stomach began to flutter. I could hear kids
crouching and laughing inside the house.

I raised my finger to the doorbell. "Hope they
like us," murmured Mr. Harrison.

"If they don't," I gave them a few shins with
his," Harrison proclaimed. He pulled out the
key Mr. Burns had given him. The door was
now opening in great anticipation and if I say
I don't know why Dad thought we needed it.

I pushed the doorbell again. Again.

The kids were making such a racket inside
no one could hear the bell.

"This will get them," Harrison declared. He
pressed the trigger on the air horn. The burst of
noise nearly blasted me off my feet.

The front door swung open. Mrs. Hendy
sprang out at us. "The clowns have arrived," she
announced.

Here a plump, round-faced woman. She had
put her white blonde hair up on top of her head,
but several strands were falling over her fore-
head. She wiped sweat off her chin.

"Four years-olds," she said sighing. "I hope
you can quieten them down. They're going
nuts!"

Mrs. Hendy led us into the living-room. Two
other parents huddled up in a small study

Harrison and I stopped in the doorway and stared at about twenty little kids, running around the room, jumping on the sofa, bouncing off the walls, hitting each other with gift-wrapping rolls, throwing stuffed toys at each other.

Mrs Henly cupped her hands around her mouth. "The clowns are here!" she shouted. "Everyone sit down for the clown show."

It took a long time, but we finally got them all sitting on the floor. A few of them were still hitting each other, and two boys were arm-wrestling on the sofa. But they were quiet enough for us to start our show.

"I'm Zappy and he's Zappy!" I announced. "We're going to make you laugh! First, we'll take a bow!"

Harrison and I took deep bows and cracked heads, just as we'd practiced.

I waited for the kids to laugh. But they didn't.

Harrison and I cracked heads again, just in case they'd missed it. This time, Harrison bowed too fast, and we really cracked heads.

The kids stared at us in silence. "When do we get cake?" a red-haired girl asked.

"Shhh. Watch the show!" Mrs Henly ordered.

"It's my birthday! I want cake!" the red-haired girl screamed.

"Zappy and I are going to tell you some funny knock-knock jokes." I announced. "Knock

knock!" I shouted, and knocked on Harrison's head.

I thought the little kids would crack up when I knocked on his head but they stayed just in silence.

"Knock knock!" I repeated, knocking on him again.

"Who's there?" he asked.

"Harry?"

"Harry who?"

"I never up and answer the door."

Silence. A cold silence.

Several kids began to whisper to each other. Two girls near me suddenly started giggling with me.

"They don't get the jokes," Harrison whispered. "They're too young." He pointed to the line. "Start the jokes."

"Okay," said one girl, pulled out the top two cards. "Knew his would make them laugh."

Harrison and I both punched our fists into our squinting-card eyes. Each time we poked a card, we squinted each other in the face.

"They're going to go nuts for this one," whispered. "Let's play cards, Xappy!" announced loudly. "Do you kids like to play cards?"

"No!" the birthday girl answered. Several kids laughed. The first laughter we'd heard all afternoon.

"Let me cut the deck!" Harrison declared. He pulled out a huge butcher's knife.

"Put that knife away!" Mrs. Hanby shrieked. A little boy near the fireplace started to cry.

"Sorry. Just a joke," Harrison gulped. He shoved the knife into the bag.

"You're a very bad card player, Zappy," I said, dealing him a card. "When it comes to cards, you're all wet!"

I squeezed the pump hidden in my costume pocket. The card didn't squirt. I squeezed it again.

No water. Nothing.

"Well, here's a card for you!" Harrison cried. He held the card towards my face. I could not see him squeezing the hidden pump in his costume.

But the card didn't squirt.

The kids started to become restless. Two girls began chasing each other around the sofa. Three boys started wrestling.

"Did you fill the cards with water?" Harrison whispered.

"No?" I cried. "You were supposed to fill them!"

"No. You were, Julian."

"Is it time for cake now?" the birthday girl demanded.

"Those clothes are stupid!" the boy next to her griped.

"They stink," a boy grumbled, his hand buried in his hands.

"Give them a chance!" Mrs. Hanby scolded.

My stomach bawled for beans and milk. My knees were trembling. I knew I was sweating my make-up off.

We were waiting. We hadn't made them cough once. That Anna was whipped to reason.

He bent over wildly to the bag. "Get the next bag in, girl."

He pulled out the wrapped room. My hands were shaking as I unwrapped it.

"I can't see the glint under sacks. I haven't got. But who would take to try some to figure out."

"A lady. Seven kids cheered. Several in our group took to crying. Her hands.

"It is as warm as a child's."

"What kind?" a pretty-looking, dark-skinned girl whispered. "A girl? Or a boy?"

"It's a girl. She's got a little girl. I need to know what she's doing. Who wants to see some of today's?"

Her face lit up as she called out. "I've called a boy and a girl to be here."

The woman and child plan to squirt at kids and she whipped around. We planned to let her smile to see if her Harrison was. We would send her to the staff. And we'd both get whipped again in the face.

We hadn't been able to purchase the one because the whipped room had to be added to

the last minute. But we knew we had to get big laughs with this one.

"Go ahead. Sniff the pie." I urged the boy and girl.

They were really cute. They didn't want to get too close.

"Are you going to push it in our faces?" the little girl asked.

"Would Zappy and I do a thing like that?" I cried. "Go ahead. Just sniff it."

Slowly they bent down to sniff the pie.

And big, wet globe of whipped cream shot up and splattered their faces.

"Oooops!" Harrison cried.

All around the room, kids gasped in surprise. A few started to laugh.

But the boy and girl let out deafening shrieks.

"My eyes! My eyes! It's burning my eyes!" the boy wailed. He slapped frantically at his face, struggling to wipe the whipped cream away.

"It's burning me!" the girl cried. She began to sob. "Wipe it away! It's burning my skin!"

Mrs. Healy hurried over. Several other parents came running out of the study. A lot of kids were crying. The boy and girl were screaming at the top of their lungs.

Mrs. Healy glared furiously at me. "What have you done to them?" she snapped.

"Must be something wrong with the trick," I explained lamely.

Harrison and I stepped out under dark skies. Cold raindrops hit my face and shoulders. I knew the white clown make-up was running down my face, but I didn't care.

I let out a sob. "What am I going to do?" I wailed. "How can I explain to my mum what happened? I'm so embarrassed!"

"Just tell her we stunk," Harrison mumbled.

We trudged sadly down to the street. Our trainers crunched over the gravel drive. The wind changed direction, blowing the cold rain into our faces.

Harrison turned to me. His eyes flashed wickedly inside the black make-up circles.

"Jillias, I have an idea!" he cried. "Let's bring Slappy to life!"

"How about it?" Harrison demanded. "A whole new act. What do you say?"

"Well . . . okay." I agreed, rubbing my eyes. "At least we won't need costumes and make-up for a ventriloquist act." I ripped the wet ruffle off and stuffed it in the bag. "I never want to be a clown again!"

It ruined the whole weekend. The weather fitted my gloomy mood perfectly.

When Mum asked me how the birthday party went, I snapped, "Don't even mention it."

Mum probably got the whole ugly story from Mrs. Henry, because she never mentioned it to me again.

I cornered the twins in their room and angrily blamed them for ruining my clown act. "You could have blinded those kids with that soap!" I screamed.

"But we didn't do it," Katie insisted. "We didn't touch your stupid tricks."

"We weren't even home," Amanda added. "We were visiting our friend Stevie yesterday remember?"

I gasped. She was right. The twins hadn't been home.

But then . . . who had switched the soap for the whipped cream?

Who?

~ ~ ~

After school on Monday, when Harrison is sitting back, hanging up with me or busy on his side, I tell him the whole story, in my repetitive "That can't have a relationship, dummy."

I was sitting on the sofa, the couch he looked down on me, "in who's car are you going to get on?" asked, involving in me.

"I asked her to go to her car, later, it happened. They go to me, the very thing that happened."

I squeezed my nose over. "Why do you want her?"

"I see, he has another dummy he could get on. Harrison said, 'It must be he could have us too.'"

I climbed to my feet. "But when I saw him on the street that day, he acted so weirdly remember? He yelled at me to get rid of Slappy. Then he ran away."

"Maybe he was in a hurry or something," Harrison said. He pulled a sheet of paper from his jacket pocket. "I have his address here. Can you come with me to his house?"

I hesitated. I didn't really want to go and see Jimmy O'Leary. But I did want to ask him whether or not Slappy had said what I had told you or myself.

"Okay," said Jimmy to my nose. "What could happen?"

16

"My parents don't like me riding my bike this far," I told Harrison.

He was pedalling hard, holding the ventriloquist's address in one hand. "It's just a few blocks past Dawson, I think," he replied, breathing hard.

We had passed through our neighbourhood, through the town centre, and then through several small neighbourhoods on the other side of town. After some wooded blocks, the houses became smaller and closer together.

"This is a pretty bad neighbourhood," I said as my bike bumped over some railway tracks. A scraggly dog chased us for a few blocks, barking and nipping at my legs.

We pedalled past a row of beat-up-looking mobile homes lined up in a weed-choked plot. "Harrison — are you sure you know where you're going?" I cried.

"Well . . ." He stared at the address in his

hand as if it were a road map. Suddenly, he
broke to a squealing stop. "Hey - that must
be the house. Up there."

He pointed to a big gray-shingled house
tucked back in the trees. Nearly hidden by low
tree branches. The house stood completely
dark. A rolled-up newspaper rested on the roof
just above the guttering. The lawn was over-
grown with tall grass and weeds.

"Yes. This is it." Harrison crinkled up the
piece of paper and shoved it into his jeans
pocket.

Gazed in the deep shadows of the woods,
trying to see the house clearly. What a creepy
house. Doesn't look as if anyone is home,"
murmured.

We walked our bikes up the driveway which
was cracked and broken. The tall weeds shifted
and rustled as some kind of animal seemed to
get out of sight.

"A squirrel? A chipmunk?"

shivered.

We set our bikes down on their spools in the
tall grass that grew over the front walk. Then
we made our way on to the creaking wooden
front porch.

knocked the doorbell. But I didn't hear it
buzz.

Harrison knocked and called out. "Mr.
James - are you home?"

We waited, then knocked again. "Anybody home? Not in?"

Harrison knocked one more time and the front door swung open.

No one standing there.

I poked my head in. Darkness inside. "Anybody home?"

"Let's go in," Harrison urged, giving me a soft push. "Maybe he's in the back or something."

I hesitated. "Go in? Do you think we should?"

"Let's check it out," Harrison said.

"Well . . . okay." I took a deep breath and led the way inside.

A short hallway led into a long, narrow front room. The trees over the house blocked most of the sunlight from the windows. But even in the dim light, I could see that the room was bare.

"Anybody home?" Harrison called, copping his hands around his mouth. "Mr O'James? Are you here?" His voice echoed off the bare walls.

We made our way quickly to the next room. Movement on the floor made me stop. "Oh, yuck," I muttered.

Cockroaches!

Dozens of them. They scampered over my raincoat. I felt them prickling my ankles.

"Owww! Get them off! Get them off me!" I jumped up and down, slapping at the disgusting, swarming bugs.

Then I leapt over them to catch up with

Harrison Green, muttered "The place is
crowding with bags."

We found ourselves in a room with a long
table down the center as first I thought it was
the hall, and then the shelves of goods and
display of things with made me realize we
were in some kind of work shop.

"Suggest someone's idea to 'We' and don't
belong in here. We should go."

Harrison ignored me and picked something
up from a corner of the long table. "Check it
out," he pushed it in front of my face.

"Hi-y," it was a wooden dummy head. It
had the same cold eyes and crooked smile as
Shaggy's.

"There are body parts all over the room."

Harrison reported. He pulled a pair of slender
legs off a shelf. Then he picked up another
dummy head.

"He must build all of his dummies here
and stoppage into the next room."

"Maybe he can build one for me," Harrison
suggested. "That would be nice."

He poked my head into the kitchen. Bare. No
food. No plates or bowls or pots and pans.

"He's gone," said Harrison. "I think he has
moved out."

"Oh, my!" Harrison protested. "We need
another dummy."

"Well, it doesn't look as if anyone lives here."

I said, I made my way into the small dining-room behind the kitchen. "I mean, look around, Harrison. Can you see . . ."

My words caught in my throat.

I gasped in horror. My hand shot up to my mouth.

Harrison saw it too. "Ohhhhh," A sick moan escaped his throat.

We both stared at the dining-room table.

At the human head lying on its side on the table.

Jimmy O'Jama's head.

27

Wu both creep forward a step at a time. They finished Harrison's poem like they were in a hurry.

Harrison shook his head and jerked his arm away. "Sorry," he murmured. "I didn't realize how hard it was to get my arm out."

Like ventriloquist's hand lay on the left ear.
His dark eyes were wide open, staring blackly
in the wall.

Lawrence left the woman picked up the bread & dumplings
hand," he said.

"Oh, now," exclaimed, protesting over my pounding heart, trying to say it "I don't believe it - it looks so real!" He made a dummy head of himself."

Harrison used his other hand to move the mouth up and down. "I'm a funny Ontario, and I'm a funny," he said in a hoarse voice, trying not to move his lips.

"Come on stop feeling around and let's go."

I pleaded "This place is really creeping me out."

"Whoa, What?" Harrison insisted.

"No I mean it," told him "I'm getting out of here — now!"

"But check this out!" Harrison cried.

I turned to him. He had set the head back on the table. And now he was flipping through a small, lettered book.

"What is that?" I demanded, moving back into the room.

"That is so cool!" Harrison exclaimed. "It's some kind of notebook. A diary. I think."

"Whose diary?" I asked, stepping up to him.

"Jimmy O'James's diary." Harrison replied. His eyes scanned the pages. "Wow. There's all this stuff about Slappy in here."

I pulled the book from Harrison's hands. "Slappy? What about Slappy?"

I quickly skimmed the pages. The diary was written in a tiny, neat handwriting. The blue ink had faded. But it was still easy to read, even in the dim light of the dining-room.

"Wow. This can't be true!" I exclaimed. "The ventriloquist must have been writing a better book or something. This can't be real."

"Why?" Harrison demanded eagerly. "What does it say?"

"It — it's unbelievable!" I stammered. My eyes slid down the page.

"But what does it say?" Harrison
perceived, disappointed.

"Squid's got it," he said, handing it
to read.

The puppet maker was an unusual
man. A man? and what? What? This
is the story as it was told to me.
The puppet maker was a sorcerer
who used his puppet creations for
evil. He possessed and says made
people sick with strange illnesses.
He built dolls that caused their
owners. Toys that stole precious
belongings while their owners slept.

"The sorcerer loved spreading
misery and evil through innocent
looking toys."

"This has to be a made up story," Harrison
interrupted. "It sounds like a story. It can't be
true."

"Cheered my bottom lip," I don't know. I
replied, flipping back through the pages. "I
don't know," he said, "it's true."

continued reading out loud.

"The dummy named Snappy is the
sorcerer's most evil invention. He
stole a coffin for its wood. He

carved the dummy from the coffin wood.

"And then the sorcerer sent his own evil into the dummy. The sorcerer's evil spirit lives inside Slappy, ready to be awakened by the reading of the evil words of magic the sorcerer wrote

"The sorcerer's evil lives inside Slappy."

"These words are underlined in the diary," I told Harrison. I read them again.

"The sorcerer's evil lives inside Slappy."

I continued reading.

"The ancient words of sorcery to bring him alive are written on a slip of paper inside the dummy's jacket. When the ancient words are read aloud, the dummy—and the evil—come to life.

"I have managed somehow to put Slappy to sleep. I'm not sure how I did it. I only care that the dummy sleeps. I show the dummy in the bin, to be headed away and crushed.

"My only hope is that no one finds

him that no one needs cheer and
words that will bring him back to life

"When Harrison is aroused shaking his
head "We found that slip of paper fedrell-
per?"

A chill ran down my neck I knew I read
those words I think goodness never touched
saying them!

Harrison stared hard at me "If this is my in-
ner then (St. gerard) would have me alone
He really could have stuffed your heart under his
pawls."

And watched the whipped cream in our milk
with soap." Added

We stared at each other in silence

But we didn't finish saying his words
remember? "and make a deep heart
resides this whole my is ready. Waiting
dignity can't come to life "can we?"

A loud crash made us both jump

The sound of the front door slamming

closed the milk dairy Harrison shoved
into his jeans pocket

We both froze staring into the dim grey light

And listened to slow scraping footstems
coming nearer nearer

The sound of a clumsy dragging self over
the floor

18

CLICK SCRAPE CLICK SCRAPE CLICK SCRAPE

I pictured Slappy his legs rubbing his hands dragging along the floor Pulling himself pulling himself through the house to us.

Harrison and I both gasped as a white-haired man in dark work overalls shuffled into the room. In his right hand, he gripped a cane, which he tapped along the floor. He walked with a limp.

His mouth opened in surprise as he saw us. He leaned heavily on the cane. "What are you kids doing in here?" he demanded. He had a breathless whistle of a voice.

"We uh were looking for Mr O'James," I finally choked out.

The man pointed behind him. "I'm the neighbour," he explained. "I saw the front door open. Thought I'd better see if someone had broken in."

"We thought maybe Mr. Kintner was home,"
told him, glancing at Harrison. "But

"I forgot his name," he impatiently interrupted,
shaking his head. "A long one. He just took all
John's time and goodness."

Harrison's eyes were now on her. "Don't
know what he has," he said. "He would say

"Thanks for taking us," and say and
"Suppose we'd better get going."

A few seconds later we were back on our
crazy pedalbox for home. The man was drop-
ping behind the ones. We rode against wind.

"What are we going to do?" Harrison
demanded impatiently, pushing hard as we
moved uphill. "Where am I going to get a
dummy for the birthday party on Saturday
night?"

"Shifted gears and rolled up beside him.
"Have an idea," said. "You will be a dummy.
I'll be the ventriloquist, and we can . . ."

"And I'll sit on your lap and make my mouth
go up and down?" Harrison cried. "No way!
Forget it, Jillian."

"Well, really don't want to do a ventrilo-
quist act," I confessed.

Harrison stared at me. "Why
not?"

"I don't want to use Slappy," I replied. A chill
rolled down my back. "I . . . I want to get the
dummy out of my house."

Harrison let out a shrill laugh. "You don't really believe what it said in that little book, do you?"

"Maybe," I replied. "Maybe I do. Maybe that dummy really is evil, Harrison. I don't want to mess with it! "

"But I've got an amazing idea!" he protested. We broke for a stop sign. "What about Mary- Ellen?" he asked.

I narrowed my eyes at him. "Excuse me? What about Mary- Ellen?"

"Maybe I could borrow that doll from your sisters," Harrison suggested. "She's so big and weird-looking, she'd make a great dummy."

"Well..." I stared at him.

"Maybe we could say that Slappy and Mary- Ellen are boyfriend and girlfriend," Harrison continued. "Maybe we could say they're going to get married. That could be funny."

I frowned. "Slappy and Mary- Ellen? You're right. It *could* be funny. But I really don't want to do it. I really don't want to use Slappy."

"Think about it," Harrison pleaded. "It's a great idea, Jillian. And we don't want to be clowns again. Just think about it... okay?"

"Okay," I replied. But I kept picturing Slappy's evil grin. And the words in the little diary repeated in my mind.

It's true, I decided.

19

"Mum! Dad!" I went screaming down the stairs.

They were already out on the front doorstep. Dad was helping Mum with her jacket.

I pushed open the storm door. "I have to tell you —" I started.

Mum turned. "Katie and Amanda are already at the table. Go and make sure they eat a good dinner." She and Dad hurried towards the car in the driveway.

"But Mum —" I cried. "My mirror! You have to see —"

"Tell me later." Mum insisted impatiently. "You've made us very late, Jillian."

"We'll talk to you when we get home," Dad said. He opened the car door and slid behind the wheel.

Mum hurried round to the passenger side. "You're in charge!" she called. "I'm trusting you, Jillian. I don't want any trouble of any kind."

"But — but —" I sputtered.

"One drive problem, and all three of you will be grounded for life!" Mum called. She tumbled in and slammed the car door.

Stuck in the front door watching the car back down the drive. The words swirled in his head. Stuck in my car or stuck in my mind?

When the car turned a corner, I saw a drop into a pond. I made my way into the living-room. Katie sat. A narrow ear with long rows of pagoda in front of her. Katie was wearing a huge row of pagoda on her neck. An aunt was picking up long needles between her fingers.

A jumpy up of the table my heart pounding. "Where was your room?" asked through clenched teeth.

Amanda stopped a long row of paper. Katie looked up at me. "Where?" she asked.

"Where are you?" Katie asked. "Where?" I asked. "Where are you?" Katie asked. "Where?" I asked. "Where are you?" Katie asked. "Where?" I asked.

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"Where are you?" Katie asked. "Where?" I asked. "Where are you?" Katie asked. "Where?" I asked.

The dummy was alive! Someone had read the words on the little slip of paper

"I'll be right back" I told the girls "Just sit there and eat your dinner."

I spun away and ran up the stairs to my room.

Perched on my dressing-table, the lipstick tube clamped in his head, Slappy stared across the room at me

I grabbed him and lifted him off the dressing-table, I carried him to my bed and set him down on his back.

Then I reached into the jacket pocket where I had stuffed the little slip of paper

My fingers fumbled in the pocket

I searched the other pocket

Then I searched the first pocket again.

Not there. Not there. Not there.

The slip of paper had gone.

20

Staring down at the grinning dummy I suddenly put the whole story together. I knew exactly what had happened.

Katie and Amanda were messing around with the dummy. They found the slip of paper. They read the words and brought the dummy to life.

They were terrified. Terrified of what they had done. Too frightened to tell Mum and Dad.

The girls had found out how evil Slappy was. And they knew it was all their fault that he'd come to life. They were too frightened to talk about it. Too frightened they'd get in terrible trouble.

I picked up the dummy in both hands and stared into his round dark eyes. "Is it true?" I cried. "Is it true, Slappy? Did my sisters bring you to life?"

The glassy eyes gazed up at me. The crooked, red mouth appeared to be laughing at me.

"Is it true?" I demanded shrilly. "Is it true?"

I grabbed the dummy by the shoulders and began to shake him. I shook him hard Harder

His heavy, wooden head bounced on his shoulders. His arms flew wildly up and down.

I shook him harder Harder

Finally I stopped. I was breathing hard, my heart pounding in my chest.

"I can't let you ruin my life!" I declared breathlessly "I can't let you destroy our family!"

I heaved him back on to the bed. He bounced twice, then lay still, going up blankly his head tilted, grinning mouth hanging open.

Trying to calm down, I made my way to the top of the stairs. "Are you two eating your dinners?" I shouted.

"Yes. We're eating!" Amanda called up to me from the dining-room.

"Where are you? What are you doing, Jillian?" Katie called.

"I'll be right down," I told them.

I crossed the hall into the bathroom. Leaning over the sink, I threw cold water on my burning-hot face. Then I washed my hands.

I was drying my hands and face with a big bath towel when I heard a crash.

So loud, the house seemed to shake.

Startled, I grabbed the side of the sink. And heard another crash. From downstairs.

I leapt out onto the hall.

And hear as it went from downstairs
And then a terrified cry
both was shrieking and crying.

21

I dived down the stairs, leaping three at a time.

"Katie? Amanda? What's wrong?" I shrieked

I burst breathlessly into the dining-room —
and cried out in shock.

Slappy sitting at the table?

Slappy?

"How — how did he get down here?" I stammered.

And then my eyes swept over the mess.

Broken dishes. Spaghetti spilled everywhere.

Milk glasses overturned. Red spaghetti stains
dripping down the walls and the window curtains.
Salad tossed everywhere. A pile of
spaghetti on the carpet.

"He did it! He did it!" the twins wailed. They
both pointed at Slappy.

The dummy slumped in his chair, head tilted
forward. One arm hung at his side. The other
hand rested in a puddle of spaghetti sauce on
the table.

glazed from the dummy to the girls' heads
back to the dummy. When . . . how? I
choked out. The words caught in my throat. My
legs were trembling so he'd grab me, he will
hold me up if he . . .

It is a horrible noise. Piles of smashed
everything. And he's so strong. He should
be able to . . .

He did it. The dummy did it. He . . .

"You've got to believe us!" Amy said
in between tears.

The dummy jumped silently in the chair.
But how did he get down from my room?

My sisters are practicing where they
could not go in a far . . .

What could I do. What should I do now?

The phone rang.

My sister started by the sound. Then . . .
away from the door. She . . . the
dummy away from the . . . and run
to the . . . to grab the phone.

"Hello?"

"Hi, Susan. . . me."

Mum.

"Everything okay?" she demanded. "You
sound so . . ."

"No!" I cried. "No. . . everything . . ."

Mum? What?

"The dummy is gone. Mum . . ."

the phone. "You've got to come home! The dummy is alive! He spilled the spaghetti and
and " I gasped for breath.

"Jillian — stop it!" Mum replied sternly
"Stop it right now. I'm very disappointed in
you."

"But Mum — " I desperately wanted to tell
her everything. But she cut me off with an exasperated cry.

"Jillian, stop it. I begged you. No more fighting
with the twins. You are in charge, Jillian.
You have to be the grown-up."

"But — but — Mum — " I spluttered.

"Don't say another word," she insisted. "I'm so
disappointed in you. Your father and I will try
to get home early. Goodbye."

She hung up.

I swallowed hard. Took a deep breath. And
hurried back to the dining-room.

*I have to lock up that dummy. I decided. I
have to lock him up before he does any more
damage.*

I stopped in the doorway — and stared at an
empty chair.

"Where is he?" I cried. "What did you do with
Slappy?"

Kate opened her mouth, but no sound came
out.

Amanda whimpered and shook her head.

"Where?" I demanded. "Where is the dummy?"

"Is he left?" Kate firmly replied in a whisper.

"Excuse me?" Petered

"But you'll hear the soft fall of footsteps. A short and then a series of steps up my stairs. It's a woman's stride."

"It's going and she'll be back," whispered Kate and Amanda exchanged big, innocent grins.

And ascended to the BT MP BT MP BT off as the lantern dimmed the stairs.

"This is the happening," muttered
forced myself to move. Now through the living room. Then I put myself up the stairs
stopped in the doorway to my room.

Slappy sat on my bed. He had a huge strand of spaghetti on his face and was slurping over the shoulder of his sports jacket.

His eyes focused to one hand of a pencil in his hand.

And drew up to the wall above my head where he had scrawled the words

WHERE IS MY BITE

22

"We've all been grounded," I told Harrison. I paced back and forth in my room, balancing the phone between my shoulder and chin. "My parents are so angry, they won't even speak to us."

"Bad news," Harrison murmured.

I glanced out of the window. A beautiful, sunny day. No school because of some teachers' conference. But I wouldn't be going anywhere. Or seeing any friends.

"I've never seen them so angry," I told Harrison. "The spaghetti stains won't come out of the curtains or the wall. We've tried everything."

"Did you tell your parents the dummy did it?" Harrison asked.

"They won't listen," replied. "Every time I mention Slappy, it makes them even more angry. They started screaming at me never to mention the dummy again."

"And do you really think he's alive?" he asked.

I shivered. "I know he is, Harrison. I locked him in a suitcase. I made sure the suitcase was double locked. We have to get him out of here. As far away as we can."

"What about the birthday party on Friday night?" Father-in-law interrupted. "We need a dummy for a party, remember?" And then he added, "But you're grounded. Does that mean we can't celebrate at the party?"

"Mum is going to let me do the party," said Mum. "Mrs. Jackson called. Her little boy is the birthday boy. But she had a flood in her basement. So we're having the party at my house. Down in the basement."

"So we need 'sluppy'." Harrison declared.

"No way!" cried I. "And no . . . we locked him in a suitcase. We'll let him out. We'll . . ." I switched the phone some other way. "We have to do his clown act. Mum said."

"We can?" he asked. "His wife will own up. Jillian. It was so bad, it made her knees cry. . . remember?"

"But the dummy . . ." I started.

"We written a whole act for the dummy and the doll. Harrison declared. "It's really funny. The kids will love it. We have to do it."

"Did he say a word I kept putting the evil grin on Sluppy's face as he sat at the dinner table. He dishes broken spaghetti smeared everywhere. Auntie came again. I saw the woman

crudely scribbled on my mirror and wall. Where
is my poster?

My whole body trembled

I couldn't do a ventriloquist act with him. I
couldn't give Slappy a chance to do more evil.

"Find another dummy," I told Harrison.
"That's the only way we can do the act. We can
use Mary-Ellen. But I won't use Slappy. You'll
have to find another dummy."

"Okay, okay," he agreed. "A new dummy. I'll
find one. No problem."

"Give me that!"

"No. It's mine!"

"You said you'd share!"

"Go and get your own!"

The first fight broke out at the birthday party
about five minutes after the guests started to
arrive.

Six-year-olds can be beasts. I should know.
My six-year-old twin sisters are beasts most of
the time.

And now, Harrison and I stood together in the
centre of my basement rec room, staring at
about fifteen six-year-olds wrestling, hopping,
jumping up and down, shouting, laughing, and
chasing each other around the room.

Harrison sagged and shook his head.
"Their parents couldn't wait to dump them here
and get out."

I sighed. "Can you blame them?"

A balloon burst — and a little girl with red braids started to cry. Harrison hurried to calm her down.

The parents were having their own party down floor. For Mrs. Simkin wanted it to be an escape — and it was her son Eddie's party!

"We'll be next door," she said, leaving Harrison and me in charge. "and about if you need us."

Harrison finally got the red-haired girl to stop crying. He hurried back to me. A football flew across the room and nearly bounced into the birthday cake. Mrs. Simkin isn't paying as much as she used to.

I glanced at one the room. Kevin and Amanda appeared to be having a good time. They were showing their huge collection of centling dolls to the other girls.

I looked down to see Eddie Elston, the birthday boy, tugging at my T-shirt. "When does the show start?" he demanded. "We want the show to start."

He began to chant, and a couple of other boys joined in. "We want the show. We want the show!"

"Let's go and get Wade and Mary-Elise," I suggested to Harrison. "At least the show will keep the kids quiet for a while."

"Maybe," Harrison said, shaking his head.

Maxie was a goofy-looking, buck-toothed dummy Harrison had found in his uncle's attic. We had practiced with Maxie and Mary-Ellen all week and it had gone really well. In fact, the act was so funny we'd laughed ourselves silly.

I couldn't wait to perform the act for the kids.

We'd hidden Maxie and Mary-Ellen in suitcases. And we'd stashed them in the cupboard in my dad's workshop on the other side of the basement.

Harrison lifted Mary-Ellen from her suitcase and straightened her hair.

I pulled Maxie's beat-up suitcase from the cupboard and set it on its side.

"Now don't forget the changes we made in the song," I warned Harrison.

He nodded. "No problem."

I clicked open Maxie's case. And lifted the lid. And reached in for Maxie.

"Nooooo!" A scream of horror burst from my throat.

"How did HE get in here?" I shrieked.

Harrison and I both stared down at Slappy.

Slappy.

Slappy.

Grimacing up at us from Maxie's suitcase.

23

"We want the show! We want the show!"

From the basement, the kids were all chanting.

"I can't do this," I told Harrison. "I'm too afraid."

"We want the show! We want the show!"

Harrison gaped at me, his suit as white as the walls. He switched down. He choked out, "We want it!"

Sappy's grip appeared to spread over my arm, even flaked as the dun bagmen went.

"We want the show! We want the show!"

Harrison grabbed my arm. "We have to do it," he insisted. "We have to do the show. The kids will riot if we don't. It'll be ugly!"

Behind us, the kids chanted and cheered. They were surging up the floor, clapping as they chanted, waiting impatiently for us.

But he was locked upstairs. I cried,

staring down at the painted, grinning face.
"Locked up tight."

"Just pick him up," Harrison ordered. "We'll do the show. Then we'll get rid of him for good. Pick him up, Jillian. Hold on to him tightly. It'll be okay."

I glanced back at the cheating kids. They were getting restless. I knew Harrison was right. I knew we had to go on with the show.

I took a deep breath — and hoisted Slappy into my arms. Harrison perched Mary-Ellen on his arms. Then we marched across the basement to begin the act.

"It's my birthday!" Eddie declared, pushing his way through several kids. "So I get the best seat." He plopped down right in front of Slappy and me.

Harrison and I sat down on tall, wooden stools. We raised Slappy and Mary-Ellen to our laps. I gripped the dummy as tight as I could. We started our show.

"Hi, doll," I made Slappy say.

"Don't call me doll!" Harrison made Mary-Ellen reply in a high, shrill voice. "I'd slap your face."

"That's okay with me. Why do you think my name is Slappy?" I made the dummy exclaim.

A few kids laughed at that. I glanced down and saw Eddie make a disgusted face.

"You're a stinkweed!" Mr. & Ellen cried in a rough voice. "I bet you love tomatoes!"

"You shouldn't call names," Slappy replied.
"Why not?"

"Because that's my job!" Slappy exclaimed.
"You're an stupid coal miner! Many folks don't know the difference between a stink weed and a person with sandwich!"

"No. What's the difference?"

I made Slappy shake his head. Remind me never to ask you for a sandwich.

Soon a kid laughed at that joke.

but I looked down and saw kiddie still frowning.
"That isn't very funny," he called up to me.
"and you be funnier!"

You said funnier?" Slappy suddenly shouted at me.
"no anything funnier and

I gurgled. I hadn't made Slappy say that.

Before could do anything, he threw his head back his eyes. In motion as jaws wide.

I heard a gurgling sound from deep inside Slappy's stomach.

And when I looked out as the gurgling grew to a roar.

And a thick green liquid poured out of Slappy's open mouth.

gushed out like water from a fire hose.
Thick green gunk. Thick as pea soup.

Slappy turned his head and sprayed the green goo over the kids. A splattered kiddie.

Sinkin at my feet. Splashed over the walls, the floor. Sprayed over the other kids.

"Ohhhhhh The smell!" a girl cried.

A foul, putrid odour rose up all around.

Slappy tilted his head back further. Turned. The disgusting green liquid sprayed over everyone.

Kids squealed and cried out in disgust. I saw a boy stand up and try to run. But his feet slid in the green gunk, and he toppled back to the floor, face down in the goo.

"It's in my eyes!" a boy screamed. "It's burning my eyes!"

"Ohhhhhh." Moans of horror and disgust rose up over the basement.

I tried to slap my hand over the dummy's mouth to stop the spray.

But Slappy jerked away from me. I cried out as he slid off my leg. He dropped to the floor. Stood on two feet. Tilted up his head and sprayed out more of the stinking, thick liquid.

Kids were trying to scramble away. Some were crying. I saw two boys bent over vomiting on the floor.

I turned to Harrison. "What are we going to do?"

But before Harrison could answer, Slappy took two steps across the floor. He grabbed Eddie Benkin with both wooden hands.

And who, supposing a hungry man, he
dragged the terrified boy across the room.

'Slappy - snap' choked out.

He started to me, his eyes grew wider than
ever. His eyes ablaze with excitement.

'That's all, that's all,' Slappy screamed. 'I
want my brand.'

24

"He's hurting me!" Eddie shrieked. "Get him off! Get him off!"

"Keep away from me!" Slappy barked. "I'll hurt him! I'll hurt him BAD!" He jerked Eddie hard, yanking him across the floor.

I froze in horror. Kids were screaming and crying, slipping and falling in the sickening green slunk.

This can't be happening! I told myself.

I turned to Harrison. His hair was soaked in the green liquid. It had splashed over his shirt and jeans.

"What can we do?" I cried over the screams of the kids.

He gave me a helpless shrug.

"I'm going for help!" I told him. I took off towards the basement stairs.

"Where do you think you're going?" Slappy demanded angrily. He jerked Eddie from side to side.

"Oh! You're h-ting me!" Eddie whined.

My trousers slid in the green goo. I squinted both eyes. Caught my nose. Started to run again.

I didn't see Slapp's foot jerk up. He tripped me and I fell forward.

"Oinkink!" I let out a cry of disgust as green goo fell down my throat. He stinking liquid slid along on my stomach a meter or so, landed on my nose. Pulled myself to my feet.

Wiped the green goo off my face. I was covered in it.

"If you go upstairs. Oh, h-rry, h-rry, h-rry!" Slappy rasped. His shrill voice sent chills down my back.

I did to a stop and spun round. "What's come to my mind?" I muttered.

"Let me go. Let me go!" Eddie squealed and struggled to break free. But the dummies were on hands clamped harder on the boy's shoulders.

Slapp's eyes grew wider. His mind was reeling with excitement.

"This is MY party now!" he cried. "But I don't WANT a birthday party! I want a WEDDING party! I'm ready to marry my bride. I'm ready to marry the one who will be my SLAVE for life!"

I stared at him, my heart pounding. The sickening taste of the green goo made my stomach churn.

"I want my **BRIDE!**" Slappy demanded at the top of his lungs. "I want my bride **NOW!**"

"Okay!" I cried, my voice trembly and weak. "Okay. if we give you your bride. do you promise to go away with her? Do you promise you'll take her away and not hurt anyone here?"

The dummy's eyes flashed. He nodded his grinning, wooden head.

"Yessss," he hissed. "I *will* take my bride away!"

"Okay. Okay. Okay," I replied breathlessly thinking hard. I turned to Harrison. "Give Slappy his bride," I instructed him.

Harrison gaped at me. "Huh?"

"His bride." I repeated, motioning with both hands. "Mary-Ellen. Give Slappy his bride."

"Oh." Harrison caught on. He raised Mary-Ellen in both hands. Then he crossed the room to Slappy. And handed the big doll to him.

Slappy stared at Mary-Ellen for a long moment.

Then, in my shock, he let out an angry growl and heaved the doll across the basement.

"Are you **CRAZY!**" Slappy screamed. "That ugly piece of junk! She can't be my bride!"

Slappy reached out and grabbed me by the wrist.

"Jillson, *YOU* are my bride!" he cried.

25

"Ow!" cried out as the dunny's gate slammed round my wrist.

My hand jerked my arm round. But I couldn't pull it.

Around the room, kids were screaming and crying. I saw two girls hugging each other against the wall, their legs trembling.

Edna stood in the middle of the room hugging James. His teeth clattered from fear.

I looked for Katie and Amanda. They were huddled up like two cats cornered in green grass.

Harriet stood in shock, her mouth hanging open. He took a step towards me, his fingers tapping in the green slime.

Turning fiercely, I angrily asked me what he pressed his wooden face against my ear.

"You will be my slave," he whispered. "You will be my slave for the rest of your life."

"No!" I answered.

I tugged again. Tugged with all my strength
to pull myself free.

But the evil dummy's grip tightened even
more. I couldn't move.

I turned to Harrison. I opened my mouth to
tell him to run up the stairs, to bring the
parents from next door.

But before I could say a word, a voice rang out
through the basement.

A female voice. An angry voice.

"Let GO of that girl, Biopsy!" the voice cried.
"She isn't your bride! I AM!"

I turned to see who was screaming.

Mary-Elizabeth.

26

Kids screamed and cried. Four girls huddled against the wall, hugging each other.

The big doll stomped across the floor, her heavy boots clapping behind her. She stomped right over two kids. Her hands were clenched into tight fists.

"You worthless stick of rotting wood!" she screamed at Slappy. She strode up to him and gave him a hard shove with both fists.

Startled, Slappy staggered back.

His hand slid off me, holding my throbbing wrist. I backed away.

Mary Ellen grabbed Slappy by the throat. "Did you give me to life for *THIS*?" she exclaimed furiously. "I was your *friend*!"

"Uh!" I let out a gasp. I narrowed my eyes at the happy doll. "You brought Slappy to life?" choked out.

The doll nodded. She shook Slappy hard. "Yes,

toothpick!" she snarled. "I'll turn you into SAWDUST if you don't shape up!"

As I gaped in shock, Katie and Amanda came running up to me.

"We wanted to tell you, Jillian," Katie sobbed. "But Mary-Elise wouldn't let us. The first day Dad brought her home, she started talking to us. Ordering us around. She said if we told anyone, she'd hurt us. We didn't know what to do. We were so scared. We'd never had a doll who was really alive!"

"Mary-Elise did everything!" Amanda cried. "She stuffed your lizard in Slappy's mouth. She broke the dishes and threw the spaghetti everywhere. She scribbled those messages in your room."

"She carried the dummy everywhere," Katie added. "Mary-Elise made Amanda and me say it was the dummy who did everything. But Slappy wasn't alive — until the party! He was never alive! Mary-Elise did everything!"

"She wanted to hurt you and get you in trouble," Amanda told me.

A doll and a dummy — both alive. Both evil. The room started to spin round me.

I turned to Mary-Elise. "Why?" I choked out. "Why did you do all those things to me?"

The doll's red lips formed an angry sneer. "Because you said you hated me," she growled. "Because you never wanted the girls to take

me anywhere. You slapped me, Jiltian, and
threw me away, and shoved my head into the
manure.

Mary Ellen's eyes flared with fury. "Did you
ever hear of (did I hear of) any woman in
Ireland ever would insult that man? And
And so used to thimself and to seduce my
niece, didn't bring him to a full straight
just before the party. Turned up party.

He so squeezed my hand. Amanda you
wanted to get into the bed. She asked for
Mary Ellen said she was an old. She said we and
to take care of her for ever.

"We hated her. But she made us take her
everywhere. Amanda cried. Along my other
and. "She was so nasty to us.

Enough talk. Mary Ellen screamed. She
with Slappy woman. And now Slappy and will
rule forever. And you. Jiltian. You will be
our slave. I plan to make you suffer for the
rest of your life."

She turned to Slappy. "Right my darling" Am
right."

"You say." Slappy cried. "No more."

He shot up and took his fist among the hair
of her jaw.

The wooden fist hit the girl's head with a loud
THWACK.

Mary Ellen uttered a shocked groan and
crumpled to the floor.

27

"I will rule!" Slappy declared, raising both hands high above his head in victory. "But not with an ugly rag doll like you!"

He stared down at Mary-Ellen, sprawled on her back on the floor. His evil grin grew wider. "Why don't you learn to say goo-goo?" he snarled. "Maybe someone will think you're cute!"

He pulled his big shoe back and gave her a hard kick in the side. "Someone take the baby doll out and bury her!" he declared nastily.

He pulled back his foot and kicked the doll again.

Mary-Ellen didn't move.

Grimacing in triumph, Slappy spun round and grabbed my wrist again. "Come with me!" he ordered.

"Let go of me! Let go!" I shrieked.

"Never!" he cried. "You are my bride now, Jillian. You will go wherever I tell you to go."

The wooden hand clamped harder around my wrist.

"Oww! You're hurting me!" I wailed. "Let go! Let go!"

He threw back his head and uttered a scornful laugh. "You're hurtin' me!" he cried in a high, hoarseish voice, mocking me.

Then, without warning, he swung his head against my forehead as a hard head-butt.

Uhh! Oh! I groaned as he spun about, brought my head down my chin as usual.

"What's your *Pick Me Pick Me* game?" he dumbly demanded. "That was just a *LOVE TALK*!" He threw back his head in another high pitched laugh.

My head spinning, struggled to come down the pain. He froze me & nudged a gut free.

And he squeezed in. "What is it, *LOVE*?"

"You're not gettin' along my friend!" he he replied. "You're!"

Then, to my surprise, he released the old heavy wooden hand that was up in the air. He cried out in shock.

Shattered with. Fumbled my aching wrist.

What had happened?

Lowered my gaze. Now saw that Napoleon Allen had revved. She had grabbed & pulled a leg. Pulled him away from me. And jerked him down to the floor.

The kids screamed and cried. Katie and

Amends huddled together against the wall I
stumbled back to Harrison as the doll and the
dummy began to fight.

They wrestled over the floor rolling over
and over through the disgusting green goo.
Punching at each other, scratching, biting.

Up on their feet their arms tightening
around each other they wrestled, shoved each
other against the walls, stumbled over terrified
kids, knocked over the two wooden stools,
toppled the birthday cake to the floor.

Grunting and moaning they wrestled, tear-
ing at each other, slapping, pulling each other
over the sticky green goo.

Into Dad's workshop.

I stumbled after them. They bounced off the
work table. Stumbled over the coffee table Dad
had been working on for so long. Routed on top
of it, spreading green gunk over the polished
wood.

And then . . . then . . . it all happened so
fast.

I saw Slappy's hand shoot out. Saw him flick
on the buzz-saw.

The roar of the big saw made me cover my
ears with my hands.

And as I stared in shock, my hands to my
head, I saw Slappy shove Mary Ellen . . . shove
her . . . shove her into the whurring buzz-saw
blade.

The saw whined — a deafening, shrill whine — as it cut the big doll in half.

The blade sawed through her easily. Her bottom half — her legs, her skirt — dropped to the floor beside the big saw.

Slappy threw back his head. And laughed. Laughed in triumph. His laughter rose above the roar of the saw.

And then his laugh cut short. His grin faded. The dummy's eyes bulged in horror.

Mary-Ellen's top half held on to Slappy.

Her hands gripped him . . . gripped him tightly. And pulled him through the whirring saw blade!

The blade sliced Slappy across the waist. Sliced him in half.

Both halves fell to the floor.

I stared down at the doll and the dummy. Both sliced in half.

Both lifeless now. Lifeless once again.

Struggling to catch my breath, to slow my pounding heart, I clicked off the saw. The blade whirled silently, slowing to a stop.

I let out a long sigh of relief. Stared down at the lifeless doll, the lifeless dummy. Lying so still now.

Walking on trembling legs, I stared down at Slappy. Bent over his top half. Bent down to make sure he had no life left in him.

And his hand shot up — and grabbed my leg

28

"Ohhhhh!" I uttered a cry of horror. I fell back. Slappy's hand crumpled. Chunks lifelessly to the floor.

He didn't move again.

I took a deep breath and held it. I shut my eyes and counted to ten, struggling to calm myself.

A commotion behind me made me open my eyes and spin round. I saw Harrison running down the stairs. Several parents followed him. I realized he had run next door to get them.

Kids were screaming and crying. I hugged Katie and Amanda.

Mum and Dad stopped halfway down the stairs. "Jillian — what's all the noise?" Mum called. "What is this disgusting mess?"

"Well," I replied, "it's a bit of a long story..."

"Harrison — what are you doing with that?" I asked.

"Just reading it," he replied.

It was nearly ten o'clock that night. I was finally starting to feel better. My heartbeat had returned to normal. My legs had stopped trembling.

We had spent the rest of the day apologizing to Mrs. Simhan and the other parents. Then we all pitched in to clean up the basement.

Mum and Dad were still demanding a full explanation. I wasn't sure how I could ever explain.

Now, Harrison and I were on the sofa in the study. Katie and Amanda were sprawled on the floor, watching TV.

Harrison was leaning over the ventriloquist's diary, reading it slowly, carefully, with great interest.

"I can't believe you stole that old diary," I said.

He raised a finger to his lips. "Shhh. This is very interesting."

I groaned. "Why are you still reading that thing? It's all over. We don't have anything more to worry about."

"I'm not so sure," Harrison replied softly.

"Huh? What do you mean?" I demanded.

"Listen to what the diary says," Harrison replied. "It says that even if the dummy is destroyed, the evil may not die."

"Huh?" I cried. "It says what?"

Harrison held the little book closer to read it. "It says the dummy's body may be destroyed — but the evil spirit may not be killed. It will just move on to another body."

I shook my head. "Well, that's ridiculous," I said. "Slappy is dead. Dead, dead, dead."

Harrison shrugged. "The diary says the evil can be passed to someone who was close to the dummy."

I turned to Katie and Amanda. "That's ridiculous — isn't it, girls?"

They looked up from the TV and grinned at Harrison and me.

I narrowed my eyes and studied them. Why do they have such strange grins on their faces? I wondered.

I stared at them for a long while.

"Harrison," I whispered. "Guess what? I'm finally going to get my revenge."

I tilted back my head, opened my mouth wide, turned to my sisters — and spewed thick green gunk all over them.